

RARY
INEX

RHYMES OF A HOMESTEADER

ELLIOTT C. LINCOLN

CORNELL
UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY



BOUGHT WITH THE INCOME
OF THE SAGE ENDOWMENT
FUND GIVEN IN 1891 BY
HENRY WILLIAMS SAGE

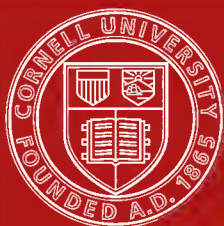
Cornell University Library
PS 3523.I368R4 1920

Rhymes of a homesteader.



3 1924 021 760 586

olin



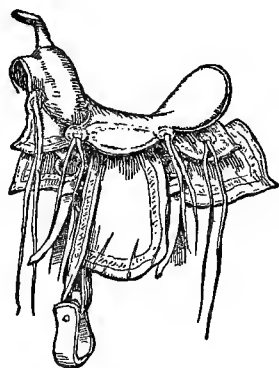
Cornell University
Library

The original of this book is in
the Cornell University Library.

There are no known copyright restrictions in
the United States on the use of the text.

<http://www.archive.org/details/cu31924021760586>

Rhymes of a Homesteader



RHYMES OF A HOMESTEADER

By ELLIOTT C. LINCOLN



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press Cambridge
1920

COPYRIGHT, 1920, BY ELLIOTT C. LINCOLN

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Acknowledgment

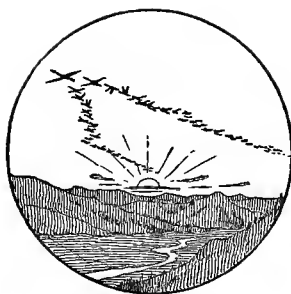
THE author wishes to thank the editors of *Contemporary Verse*, *Adventure*, *Overland*, and *Sunset* for their permission to reprint verses originally appearing in those magazines.

Contents

THE SUNFLOWER ROAD	3
THE VARMIN'T	5
ANGELA	6
THE WHITE GERANIUM	11
AT THE HOME STATION	13
MONTANA NIGHT	16
SUMMER WEATHER	17
MRS. SENATOR JONES	19
HILLS	21
THREE A.M.	22
AN EVENING WITH BROWNING	23
WHEEL TRACKS	26
THE HOMESTEADER	27
RAIN IN THE NIGHT	28
ETHICS	29
THE SHEEP-HERDER	30
THE SPRING	32
HENRY STUBBS	33
THE PHONOGRAPH	35
WILD GEESE	37
FORTY BELOW	38

CONTENTS

THE LONESOME-DEVIL	39
MYSTERIES	42
THE CHINOOK	44
MORNING IN THE BOTTOM	46
HARVEST HANDS	47
OLD TRAILS	49
IN PROTEST	50
SPRING FEVER	51
LODGE-STONES	52
HIS SADDLE	54
THE THIRD YEAR	55
THE CRITIC	57
OVERHEARD IN THE SMOKING COMPARTMENT	59
THE GAME OF GAMES	63
HOPE	66
THE MORNING RIDE	68
DAY DREAMS	70
THE MEADOWLARK	71
A SONG OF THE TRAIL	72
TEMPTATION	73
A SONG OF THE WIRE FENCE	75
SPIRITS OF THE BENCHLAND	76
THE OLD-TIMER REMARKS —	78



Rhymes of a Homesteader

Rhymes of a Homesteader

· ·

The Sunflower Road

THERE'S a land of opal mountains, singing creeks,
and springing fountains,
A land of magic distances in hazy, lazy light,
Where the pastel greens, and yellows, amber
browns, and purple shadows,
Make a glory of the daytime, and it's dusty blue
at night.

When the summer sun is burning, there a friendly
road is turning,
Twisting, bending, rising, falling — just a trail
among the hills;
But 't is bordered by the graces of a million golden
faces,
And the laughter of the sunflowers frees the heart
of all its ills.

Now the winter snows are driven through the
land; the trail is hidden.
Desolate, the white hills glitter under skies of
turquoise blue.

RHYMES OF A HOMESTEADER

But in June comes summer weather, and again
we'll ride together
On that friendly, glowing, happy road, just wide
enough for two.

The Varmint

OLD BILL HOBBS, of the Badger-Track,
Had n't no use fer an automobile;
Said that the blame thing made him feel
Like somethin' was crawlin' right up his back.
Hated the *smell* of the pesky thing,
By jing!

Put him straddle a coffin-head,
Why, he could stick till the cinch-ring bust;
Hosses an' leather a man could trust.
But them durn autos — now he's heard said
That's how Jim Whittaker bruk his neck,
By heck!

That's the talk that Bill used to make,
Bangin' his fist in the palm of his hand;
But he took, fer trade on a piece of land,
A second-hand car, an' a new bull rake.
Now he's the champeen highway pest
In the West.

Goes *honk, honk*, as he whizzes by:
Likes to look back, with a maddenin' grin,
An' watch, while yer lead team tries to shin
The section fence, four wires high.
Somethin' 'll happen to old Bill yet!
You bet!

Angela

WHY did n't I come down to the gate
An' speak to Mis' Perkins? Aw, now — say!
Somebody told you! Every day
It's gettin' worse. No? Well, I'd hate
Fer a friend of mine to be temptin' fate
Conversin' with Angela that-a-way.

Smoke? Sure, thanks. I reckon you're right;
It's fellers like you that start a row
Ignorant like. I'll tell you now
Mis' Perkins' name ain't no delight
On the Flyin'-A. When she comes in sight
Ain't nobody hangin' around, nohow.

* * * * *

Angela Gibbs come here fer to teach
On Antelope Flat, School Distric' Ten.
Seven year back, that must 'a' been.
Angela were n't no blushin' peach,
An' the men, they sorter kept out of reach.
(No, sir, she were n't Mis' Perkins, then.)

Time, it ain't changed her. Notice her chin
Standin' out like a saddle-horn? — her nose
High in the withers? Yes, they goes
Fine with the way her lips pinch in

ANGELA

At the corners. Looked like an awful sin
To spend all the money she did, on clothes.

At the Flyin'-A was Jake, a breed
From the Musselshell country, Billy Fee,
Limpin' Jim Perkins — bruk his knee
Toppin' a bad 'un — an' a Swede
By the name of Olsen. There ain't no need
Confessin' the best of 'em all, was me.

Livin' together happy as fleas
We was, till the day a boy come,
Hellity-whoop, on a sweatin' roan,
Down to the bunk-house. Says that he's
Rode from Miss Gibbs' fer to give us *these*,
An' wait fer to carry the answers home.

Hands us a bunch of notes that is fix
Poetry style. She writ that we —
Billy, an' Jim, an' Jake, an' me,
An' Ole — was bid fer grub at six,
On the day each bird of the woodland picks
His mate, by Saint Valentine's own decree.

Was n't a one of us hankered to go,
But, shucks, if we did n't it would look
Like we was scairt. There were n't no cook,
Female or male, could bluff *us* ; no,

RHYMES OF A HOMESTEADER

Not even Angela Gibbs. An' so
We swallowed the bait, an' the whole blame hook.

An' quarter to six on Valentine's night,
The five of us, each in his Sunday best
Stetson, an' chaps, an' buckskin vest,
Knocks at Miss Gibbs's door, polite.
Our knees was shakin'; there were n't a mite
Of pleasure in bein' the lady's guest.

Angela, she throws open the door
So quick that it gives us all a start;
Pins to each feller a paper heart
Like to the big one that she wore
On her shirt, an' says that it's *ancient lore*,
Jest some of Saint Valentine's funny art.

Then, enterin' in, I sees how the room
Is littered with gilded paper rings,
An' cupids, an' doves with stuck-on wings,
An' more of them hearts — they seemed to loom
Especial ominous in the gloom
Made by a smokin' dish, that swings.

In less 'n a minute we're sittin' round
The table. An', say, I felt the sweat
Start, when I see the way she'd set

ANGELA

The thing. An' Jake, he makes a sound
Like a cuss-word. None of us ever found
The names of them eatin' tools, even yet.

Fidgetin' round, an' tryin' to find
A spoon that would match the one she had,
Twistin' our napkins, feelin' sad,
We drinks the soup. I calls to mind
There was somebody talkin' right refined:
Not me, I was worryin' too darn bad.

But sudden I sees a glimmer of hope
Go chasin' itself 'cross old Bill's face.
Angela had to leave her place
An' go to the kitchen. Smooth as soap
Bill sneaks from his chair; we gets the dope;
Stampedes in a bunched-up, headlong race,

An' climbs on our ponies; never looks back
To see what happened to Limpin' Jim —
Maybe his knee went back on him
An' slowed him up. We hits the track
Fer home, stretched out like a huntin'-pack,
The four of us shakin' in every limb.

But in a minute all of us check
Our ponies, an' turn, for a awful yell

RHYMES OF A HOMESTEADER

Rises behind us. Jim had fell,
An' skinny arms was round his neck,
An' we knows Jim's life is a hopeless wreck,
But we don't try to save him — we runs like
hell.

Justice of Peace from Antelope Flat,
He married 'em, so the paper said.
Angela makes her chance to shed
The name of Gibbs. Jim Perkins' hat
Is gone from his bunk. We reckon that
Fer the Flyin'-A, poor Jim, he's dead.

Frequent we sees what used to be him
On family errands, poor old cuss;
Limpin', down-hearted, timorous,
With Angela leadin', calm an' grim.
But we don't say nothin' at all to Jim,
'Cause Jim says nothin' at all to us.

* * * * *

Scairt of Mis' Perkins? Well, to state
Things honest, Jim's hair is pretty gray,
An' Angela don't plan no delay
When poor Jim leaves her desolate.
She's a-lookin' round fer another mate
Right now; an' it's safer to keep away.

The White Geranium

MY Minnie don't seem like herself of late;
She ain't so talkative, don't seem to care
Fer things about the ranch the way she did
Less 'n a year ago. Why, jest at first
She seemed more like a kid let out from school
Than like a wife. She used to run to me
Squealin' with joy like a little pig,
To tell about the new-born white-face calf
Down in the willow brush, or how she'd found
The nest old Mufflechop had hid away
So carefully. But she's grown quiet, now.

It worries me. I've seen her, more than once,
Stand at the kitchen door an' shake her fist
Like she was cursin' somethin' that she saw.
I swear there were n't a livin' thing in sight —
Jest hills. Of course it could n't be
Them she was cursin' — our old hills, that bring
A clean three thousand every year, in beef.

One day last week I lost my drivin'-gloves
An' went back to the house to hunt them up.
The door into the dinin'-room was shut
An' she was in there, talkin' low an' soft —

RHYMES OF A HOMESTEADER

Funny pet names, like "mother's love," an'
"sweet,"

An' when I opened up the door a crack
I seen her standin' by the window-sill
A-talkin' to a white geranium,
Touchin' it with her cheek, an' kissin' it,
An' talkin' to it! Seemed almighty queer
To hear her talkin' to a plant, like that.

A year or two ago I might have thought
That she was lonesome, but she's got a team,
An' Morton's ain't four miles, an' Jones's
five —
They're both good neighbors.

At the Home Station

FOLKS wus crowdin' round the station of the Earth
an' Heaven Line,

Millin' thick about the gate, an' in the road;
Waitin', happy an' excited, with their faces all
ashine,

Like they half expected somebody they knowed
Wus a-comin', not to visit, but to settle down an'
stay —

I could hear 'em talk of *Dad*, an' *Jim*, an' *Sue* —
So their eyes wus seekin', seekin', out along the
Milky Way,

'Cause the mornin' stage from Earth wus nearly
due.

An' at last we seen it comin', rockin', rollin' over
space

Where the road bends round to dodge the
mornin' star;
Swing an' lead teams on the high lope, hittin' up
an awful pace,

Wheelers pullin' like the willin' ones they are,
'Cause when Old Man Death is drivin' you can
hear the curtains pop

Every foot of all them chilly, anxious miles,

' RHYMES OF A HOMESTEADER

Till he's reached the big Home Station where he
makes his final stop,

Winds the ribbons round the brake, an' kinder
smiles.

So we watched it rollin' nearer in a whirlin' yellin'
cloud,

An' we crowded back to let 'em thunder through;
Then there's 'most a half a minute when we hardly
breathe aloud,

Till a man jest busts right out with "*Min!*
That you?"

An', "Daddy — look! There's Mother!" come a
little feller's cry,

An' a hundred others followed up their lead,
An' a mighty shout of welcome rose that nearly
split the sky:

Say! we started on a regular stampede!

There wus some wus meetin' sweethearts; they
wus holdin' of 'em tight

Like the years had only added to their charms;
An' I seen an old man cryin', though his eyes wus
happy-bright,

An' the little, gray-haired lady in his arms
Wus a-pickin' at his coat-sleeve with a kind o'
wonderin' touch,

An' — well, it ain't no use! I can't begin

AT THE HOME STATION

Fer to tell of all the laughin' lips, an' happy eyes,
an' such,
When the mornin' stage from Earth had jest
come in.

Montana Night

MONTANA night. The velvet of the sky
Is powdered thick with silver dust. Below,
A realm of half-lights, where black shadows
flow

To Stygian lakes, that spread and multiply.
Far to the east the Moccasins rise high
In jagged silhouette. Now, faint and low,
A night bird sounds his call. Soft breezes blow,
Cool with the dampness of a stream hard by.
Dim, ghostly shapes of cattle grazing near
Drift steadily across the ray of light
From a lone cabin; and I think I hear
The barking of a dog. All things unite
To lull the senses of the eye and ear
In one sweet sense of rest; Montana night.

Summer Weather

FRONT of the Boston Emporium,
Waitin' fer Twenty-Four to come,
J. Howard Toppenish set in the shade
A-swappin' stories with Jimmy Wade.

Handsome feller was J. H. T. ;
Dressed up, too, like a man should be
When he represents a wholesale house
Like Steiner, Eisenbaum, an' Strauss.

J. T. yawned an' blinked, in the glare
From the deep white dust of Main Street, where
The only movin' thing he sees
Is Jimmy's houn'-dog, huntin' fleas.

But Luck was mixin' one right then
Fer J. H. T. At eleven-ten
She had it ready, an' with a wink
She nudges him to sit up an' drink.

Then, joggin' along in a dusty haze
Come Sam Peck's widow's team of grays,
An' J. T.'s chair drops down with a whack
When she pulls 'em up at the hitchin'-rack.

RHYMES OF A HOMESTEADER

Fer Sam Peck's widow was young, an' fair,
With soft blue eyes, an' yellor hair,
An' nice red lips, an' a powdered nose,
An' a square little chin where a dimple grows.

J. T., he jumps from his squeaky seat,
An' he hurries into the dusty street,
An' the widow's heart, it drops a stitch
When J. T. offers to help her hitch.

How could she tell that he would be
Bald as an egg, at thirty-three?
An' how could he know Sam's death had been
A welcome relief from the square little chin?

That's the beginnin': in three months more
We sees 'em off, on Twenty-Four.
Justice of Peace had made 'em one,
An' their wedded life was jest begun.

But Sam Peck's widow was heard to say
That now was her chance to be de-stong-gay;
An' J. H. Toppenish says to Jim
It's the simple life of the ranch, fer him.

Now a feller can't always bank on signs,
But, jest from readin' between the lines,
Why, Jimmy an' me, we reckons how
There's the makin's there fer a blame fine row.

Mrs. Senator Jones

"The — Bridge Club met at the home of Mrs. — on Wednesday last. Mrs. Senator Tom Jones, a pioneer of — County, made high score, the prize being a pair of silk stockings." (*Item from the society column of any Sunday paper in the Northwest.*)

WOULD you tell an old pal, Mrs. Senator Jones,
If the stuff that he's readin' is true?
Was there somethin' wrong with the dealer's box
That the bank paid nothin' but four-bit sox
To her that was Boston Lou?

Now, honestly, did n't you grin at yourself
Sittin' at that ladylike game?
Did you think of the days when chips was few?
Did the cards behave like they used to do?
Did a full house look the same?

Remember the night, down at Timothy's place,
When you emptied your poke on the black,
An' the wheel spun round, an' it left you broke,
An' you laughed as if it was all a joke,
An' you slapped old Tim on the back?

Remember the smoke, an' the dealer's drone,
An' the click of the ivory ball?

RHYMES OF A HOMESTEADER

The Big Game runnin' on day an' night,
With twenty thousand, gold, in sight,
An' the hush when a man would call?

Ain't there plenty of times, Mrs. Senator Jones,
When the lookin'-glass shows you're — well —
 plump,
That somethin' pulls at you from the past,
Till you have to talk pretty loud an' fast
To keep down the risin' lump?

Say, Lou, when you feel it's a mighty big job
Livin' up to that "Senator" stuff,
Jest remember the old gang's kind of proud
To have Lou one of the top-notch crowd;
Set your teeth, keep a-fightin'! jest bluff!

Hills

THE mountain range almost illusion seems,
Drifting along the distant meeting-line of earth
and sky;

A veil of faint, translucent amethyst,
Filmy, ethereal, as the stuff of dreams.

A low, sweet call is sounding; faint it rings,
Compelling, as the half-forgotten burden of a song
That lingers wordless in the memory,
To tell of far-off, glorious, mystic things.

I hear your voice, O hills. It bids me dare,
Forsaking all the gray, familiar paths of ordered
life,

To take the road that leads to Over There.
Your hazy depths promise adventure rare
In wondrous lands beyond, where jewels gleam,
And every man is brave, and maids are fair.

Three A.M.

Big moon swingin' in a velvet sky,
White road slitherin' below;
Coyote hollerin' a lullaby,
Pinto hawse a-joggin' slow:
 I'm a-thinkin' sleepily,
 Sorter scared, an' creepily,
'Bout a little girl I know.

Ol' bull fiddle goin' *zoom, zoom, zoom*,
Little fiddle callin' too.
Soft cheek blushin' like a rose in bloom —
What's a feller goin' ter do?
 'Course I did n't mean it —
 Glad nobody seen it —
Kinder scared I done it! Whoo!!

Big moon swingin' in a velvet sky,
White road vanishin' below.
(Too darn mad fer to say good-bye!
Nice little dancer, though.)
 Joggin' home from Lancin',
 Tired out with dancin',
Worried by a girl I know.

An Evening with Browning

SCHOOL-MARM over to Willer Crick,
She ate at our house last night,
'N' I rid on home with her, up on the bench,
With a big moon shinin' bright
'N' makin' it downright easy to talk,
But the night wus so pretty, 'n' still,
That by 'n' by we quiets down,
'N' my little cayuse, Bill,
He sorter slid over beside her hawse,
Till, accident-like, you know,
My hand it lighted on one of hers
Where it lay on the saddle bow.

Well, sir, she never yipped a-tall!
Say, I wus beginnin' to *think*,
When, all low 'n' singy, she starts to recite
From a feller named Brownin', some gink
That took his girl out for a hawseback ride
When she'd passed him the Indian sign,
'N' all he talked about, mile after mile,
Wus, it wus the very last time
He could ride with her, till the judgment day —
'N' more to the same effect:
The lady, she never spoke a word,
Least, not as I recollect.

RHYMES OF A HOMESTEADER

Don't know whether 't wus jest the moon,
Or her voice, or bein' near —
But anyhow, I wus ridin' close,
Jest waitin' to call her "dear,"
When my ol' Bill-hawse gives a jump
That pretty near spilled me flat,
'N' before I'd rightly got my seat
Or even grabbed fer my hat,
There's a little gray coyote slippin' out
From the sage where he'd reckoned to
hide,
'N' my school-marm sees him, gives a yell,
Singin' out, "Come on! Let's ride!"

Gee! gosh! The coyote wus streakin' ahead,
Jest hikin' to save his skin,
'N' ol' Bill had his weight on the bit,
Could n't nobody hold him in
From a race like that, with the school-
marm's hawse
A-leadin' him by a length:
Knees high, head low, hair flyin' loose,
She wus ridin' with all her strength.
'N' rivers of sage went tearin' by,
'N' the cold sand stung my face
Till I thinks to myself, that Brownin' guy,
He never *could* stand our pace.

AN EVENING WITH BROWNING

But the lights of the town come racin' up
'N' the coyote slips away;
So we slows our hawses down to a walk,
'N' I'm clearin' my throat to say
Some darn-fool thing about love, 'n' us,
When sudden I seems to see
That a girl who wus boss of her hawse, like
that,
Wus apt to be boss of me.
Then I says, "Good-night, Miss. Got to go,"
'N' I pulls ol' Bill-hawse back.
She don't say nothin'. Bill kinder sighs,
'N' we hits on the homeward track.

Wheel Tracks

A FULL day's ride from the nearest town,
Where the coyote howls an evening song
And the sun-baked earth is cracked and brown,
Two faint old wheel tracks drift along.

Did a prairie schooner pass this way
In the dusty haze of a summer day,
Rolling and dipping over the swells
As it followed the winding grade?
Or was it the Fargo stage went by,
With a shotgun messenger perched on high,
Swinging out in a wide détour
From the hostile ambushade?

Did a gray-beard teamster hold the lines
On a freighter bound for the placer mines,
There where a black gulch notches the range
Thirty miles from ranch or road?
Or a sunburned lad in the army blue
Of C Troop, rushing the rations through,
Sharp eyes watching the distant smoke
Of a Cheyenne signal code?

The faint old wheel tracks drift along
Just visible to the keenest sight.
Can you hear the hoofs and the cracking thong?
Was it peaceful travel, or running fight?

The Homesteader

BURIED up to his ears in debt,
Fighting the heat, and cold, and wet,
His chances worse than an even bet —
You'll find the homesteader.

Eyes burned out in the summer sun,
Skin like a beefsteak underdone;
You'd think him fifty — he's thirty-one —
But then, he's a homesteader.

Winter comes, and his note is due
(Summer was dry, and nothing grew),
So he sells his gun, and a cow or two,
And hopes, does the homesteader.

Rough and broken his acres lie,
Half of them white with alkali;
But they mean that thing he could n't buy —
A home — to the homesteader.

One part hero, and three parts fool,
All of him bulldog grit, as a rule.
He's slow to learn, but he stays in school.
"Here's How," Mister Homesteader.

Rain in the Night

HESITANT fingers tapping on the roof
Arouse a dreamy consciousness of rain.
The blackness of the night has no relief
Save the wet glimmer of a window-pane.

And now the tapping quickens, in a song
Of falling water, with sharp overtone
When great drops rustle in the chimney pipe,
Or ring upon its tin cap, weather-blown.

Soon, in a slower tempo, tiny leaks
Begin to spatter on the cabin floor,
And into pebble pools beneath the eaves,
The flooded gutters chuckling streamlets
pour.

At last the separate little rain tunes blend,
Merging their music in a drowsy hum:
And then, when all the cool, damp dark is
sweet
With smell of earth, why, then — dreams
come.

Ethics

WHEN I'm out with the bunch, in town,
I'm jest as tough as I kin be;
It's pretty nearly ten to one
That God ain't apt to notice me.

But home here, where it's bare, brown plain
Fer miles an' miles on every side,
I sorter stick right up in sight;
God could n't miss me if he tried.

'T ain't 'cause I like it, that I'm good,
The days I'm workin' on the ranch:
There ain't a soul fer God to watch
But me, I dassent take the chance.

The Sheep-Herder

“An’ comin’ home,” the boss says, “swing around
Between the butte an’ Yeller-Water Crick;
I got a band a-runnin’ there some place,
An’ the fool herder that I sent with ’em
He’ll likely lose ’em, if we don’t watch out.”
So me an’ Red, we promised him we would.

I reckon it was pretty near a week,
When one hot afternoon, round two o’clock,
We dropped down off the bench at Hangman’s
Flat

An’ seen the valley floor all peppered thick
With lumps of dirty gray that stood for sheep.
Which started us to sorter driftin’ down
Until we come to where the dike breaks through
A little ways above the N-Bar spring.
Right there we seen him, standin’ on a rock
An’ wavin’ of his arms. It sure looked queer.

We left our hawses in a little draw
An’ snuck along the dike, till we could look
Right down on top of him: a big ol’ cuss,
All wrapped up in a double-breasted coat
The sun had faded to a greasy green.

THE SHEEP-HERDER

His hat wus off — in all that blazin' heat.
Sweat drops wus runnin' from his stubby beard.
But all the time he kept a-hollerin'
An' wavin' of his arms. It sorter seemed
Like he wus readin' from a little book
Propped open on a rock in front of him:
"The Lord — my shepherd," an', "beside still
waters."

His dogs slept peaceful-like, but now 'n' then
Some woolly in the band would holler ba-a-a,
Like it wus church, and some one said Amen.

So me an' Red, we had to tell the boss
He'd better get another herder soon.

The Spring

THE gods of the open showed to me

A crystal world of mystery:

 An argent gem in a beryl ring,

 A living, bubbling, mountain spring.

In its clear depths I see

 White quartz-pebbles dancing, dancing,

 Golden rays of sunlight glancing

 On long strings of glinting bubbles

 Tracking upward from below,

 Among green banners that wave and flow

 Pliant and slow.

And a silver stream is pouring over,

Rippling down with the song of a lover

 To a valley where cottonwoods grow.

Henry Stubbs

REAL bad-men, fightin' drunks, an' such,
I ain't a-scared of them a-tall;
But say! that little Henry Stubbs,
Cashier at our First National,
 He's got my goat, an' I confess
 I get to like him less an' less.

He takes me in his little room
An' grunts at me. "Jest hev a chair,"
An' then he puts his glasses on
An' bores clean through me, with a glare
 From his blue eyes that says right plain
 I'd better not renew again.

Why, even times when I goes in
All ready fer to pay my debts,
The minute Henry looks at me
I starts to fidgetin', an' sweats,
 An' stutters, like he'd caught me right
 Inside his chicken-house at night.

Can't nothin' happen to a man
That Henry Stubbs don't know about:
He knows how many calves has died,

RHYMES OF A HOMESTEADER

An' how the wheat is turnin' out,
An' — say, I'd like to bet four-bits
He knows jest when our cat has fits!

Yes, sir, it sure does make me mad,
The way I has to knuckle down
To skinny little Henry Stubbs,
When he's the only man in town
I'd really like to boss. You see
It's Henry makes the loans to me.

The Phonograph

HALF-PAST eight: hear the kitchen clock a-tickin'?

Hired man, he's noddin', tilted back ag'in' the
door;

Pipe smoke driftin' by the lamp in shifty layers,
Collie pup behind the stove, a-thumpin' on the
floor.

"Oh, say, Jim, don't you want to play a record?

Play that Harry Lauder piece: I like to hear him
laugh."

That's about the way it goes, every single eve-
nin';

Stella does the pickin' while I run the phono-
graph.

Brass band, banjo, anythin' that's lively

Seems to be what's wanted when our repertoor
begins.

(Don't tell Stella, but the one I like especial

Makes me think of chorus girls, an' rows of
shiny shins.)

But on towards nine o'clock somethin' kinder
starts her

Pickin' out the quiet songs we liked when we
wus young —

RHYMES OF A HOMESTEADER

Ol'-time songs that we used to sing at parties,
Songs that grip a feller's throat, an' stop a
feller's tongue.

"That Little Ol' Red Shawl," an' then, "Kathleen
Mavourneen,"

"Silver Threads among the Gold" — the hired
man's request;

"Down Mobile," an' "Nellie wus a Lady,"

"Annie Laurie" — that's the one that Stella
likes the best.

Then it's time for bed, but we wait for "Swanee
River,"

Always save it till the end: you know it kinder
seems

Like a feller's Ma wus a-comin' up to see him,

Comin' up to tuck him in, an' wish him pleasant
dreams.

Jew's-harp, fiddle, six-bit harmonica,

Help an awful lot in a single feller's life;

Jest the same, I'm a-bettin' on a phonograph

Beatin' all the others, when a feller has a wife.

Wild Geese

At the fall day's ending
Low, gray skies are blending
In a sullen canopy of equinoctial night,
And from out of cloudland,
Over breaks and ploughed land,
Ring the stirring bugle notes of wild geese
taking flight.

Wavering formations
Seek far destinations
Where the sunny marshes border amethystine seas.
Buffeted, wing-weary,
Still their calls ring cheery,
Racing with the winter night when all
the waters freeze.

Eager eyes can follow
Over hill and hollow
Floating shadows found and lost against
an evening sky;
Eager hearts leap bravely,
Here where men walk gravely,
Leap in primitive response to autumn's
wander cry.

Forty Below

FORTY below! the dead hills rise
Till their cold fields blend with colder skies,
A blue-white glitter that blurs the sight
With floating dots of ebonite,
And the frost-filled air makes each hard breath
Stab at my throat like a spear of death.

Down by the creek the cattle crush
Into shreds the rattling willow brush;
Rough, bony cattle with staring coats;
Their dull eyes watch the starved coyotes
That are slowly drifting, hunger-spurred,
To the weakest calf in the weakened herd.

Crunching and squeaking, blowing steam
From white-rimmed nostrils, comes a team;
Their driver beating his mittened hands
In frantic haste. He understands
That life itself is touch-and-go,
Out in the hell of forty below.

The Lonesome-Devil

EVER see the lonesome-devil? Sure I have!

He's little, and blue, and thin.

His clothes are old, and ragged, and they flop
about,

And he grins — a mean, blue grin.

He comes in late September, and he sticks around
till spring,

And I hate that little lonesome-devil worse than
anything.

Now he never is with other devils, always comes
alone

In the dark, or cold, or wet.

I reckon I'm his special friend; he likes to be

Jest as close as he can get.

When I'm feeling sad, and lonely, and the world is
full of care,

Then I'm pretty sure to find him squatted right
behind my chair.

If a chill north wind is blowing from a lead-gray
sky

Over hills all white, and cold;

If the only bit of reading matter in the house

Is a paper two weeks old;

RHYMES OF A HOMESTEADER

Then the snow on top the big drift rises whirling in
the air,
And I see the lonesome-devil dancing, grinning at
me there.

I hate to go for water after six at night;
It kind of chills my bones;
For just beyond the spring there stands a tall,
black pine,
That sways, and creaks, and groans.
Look! swinging on the highest branch, and wig-
gling his toes
Sits that little lonesome-devil, with his fingers to
his nose.

In the long December evenings I can keep him out
If I close the shutters tight,
And cram the stove with wood until it glows red-
hot;
He's afraid of warmth, and light.
But I know he's prowling round the house as lonely
as can be,
For he whistles through the keyhole at me,
"Wh-e-e, wh-e-ee, wh-e-eee!"

But every year there comes a time when soft winds
blow,
And the bluebird calls again;

THE LONESOME-DEVIL

When every foot of ploughing on the warm south
slope

Is green with sprouting grain.

So I get to feeling cheerful, 'cause the winter's at
an end,

And the little lonesome-devil has to find some
other friend.

Mysteries

ME an' Red, we heard Joe talkin' with his girl,
when they wus walkin'

Home from Barta's shivaree the other night.
Joe's a disputatious loafer; she wus squealin' like
a gopher,

An' the argument wus gettin' near a fight.

Joe, he says, "See here: do women like to strip an'
go in swimmin'

On a hot an' sticky August afternoon?
Is there any girl that knows what it is to shuck her
clothes

An' burn her arms an' back a deep maroon?
Does a mother spank her daughter, if she's been
into the water

An' some other feller's gone an' stole her skirt?
Do they play at 'king an' queen'? Is there any girl
so mean

As to tie knots in her sister's undershirt?

"Sue, an' May, an' Jane, an' Lizzy — are they
ever sick an' dizzy

Smokin' cubeb cigarettes behind the barn?
Does it scare 'em most to death when their mother
smells their breath?

Do they ever say a stronger word than 'darn'?

MYSTERIES

Is it foreign stamps, or pickles, that they purchase
with the nickels

Daddy gave 'em for the contribution box?

Do they hide 'The Bandit's Head' underneath the
feather-bed?

Do they ever break a window, throwin' rocks?"

Then Joe says he'd like suggestions for the answer
to these questions.

'Cause they prove a girl don't *dare* to have no
fun.

But he squirmed like he wus shot when she spits,

"You'll learn a lot

If you're ever brave enough to marry one!"

The Chinook

LAST night we shivered when we went to bed;
The stars were snapping, blue and silver light
Shot in broad streamers from the northern bench.
The mercury was down to ten below,
And every window-pane was white with frost.

But sometime in the night there came a stir,
A low, warm breathing, then a deeper sleep.

When we awoke this morning, spongy, clouds
Had piled themselves about the mountain-tops.
Above the creek, icebound but yesterday,
A thin gray vapor rose. Brown patches spread,
Like ragged continents, upon the hills,
And trodden trails were black and shining ribbons.

Lou Fong, our cook, sang at his work, and grinned
To see the clucking, mud-splashed Orpingtons
Fight for the scraps he threw them, dodging out
In fluffed-up indignation from the flood
That poured down from the eaves. The hired men
Came stamping in to breakfast:

“Sure does feel
Almighty good, jest to be warm again.”

THE CHINOOK

It seemed to me as though a rigid earth
Relaxed and smiled — the way a man might
 smile
Who rested after weeks of gruelling battle.

Morning in the Bottom

THE valley floor is emerald dusk,
But the little leaves flutter and sing.
With rustle, and chitter, and squeak, and whir,
The wild life wakens, feather and fur,
At the word the green leaves bring
When the gray winds, the dawn winds,
Blow from a brightening sky.

The upper rimrock flushes with rose
To a sudden caress of the sun.
Beneath, where a curve of the river glints,
A silver mirror echoes the tints
Of another day, begun
With the cool winds, the hill winds,
That blow from an upland sky.

A blue-gray smoke veil floats through the brush,
A driftwood fire gleams bright.
And now, to a man with a jaded soul,
The morning calls, till his heart is whole,
And he laughs with a child's delight
At the good winds, the clean winds,
That blow from an open sky.

Harvest Hands

WHEN the ripe wheat billows, an' the broad fields
shimmer,

There's a wind-burned army workin' west on
track an' trail:

Some, they shuffle through the dust, keep the
road, an' simmer,

Then there's others, wiser ones, that make the
trip by rail.

They're a rough-neck bunch, but they come in
mighty handy,

'Cause a man needs help, an' he can't afford to
wait.

Jim, or Sam, or Paul, or Joe; Peter, Jake, or
Sandy —

Twenty inches through the chest is plenty ade-
quate.

It's a man-sized job, shockin' wheat, 'cause the
binder

Starts to runnin' round sun-up, an' she never
quits till dark.

Takes a lot of bone an' muscle, keepin' up behind
her,

Sweatin', with the mercury around the hundred
mark.

RHYMES OF A HOMESTEADER

Sleepin' in his clothes, in the hawse barn, maybe,
'Cause he don't much bother for a little clean
dirt.

Eatin' with the family, playin' with the baby,
Washin' at the kitchen pump, an' wipin' on a
shirt.

Then he's headin' for the road, through the crisp,
brown stubble,

An' he's hopin' for a freight on the north-
bound track:

Botherin' to say good-bye is hardly worth his
trouble —

Always movin', movin' on, an' never comin'
back.

Old Trails

WE used to ride on open trails,
When the range was wide, and the land was new,
And we sang young songs, and told young tales,
And we laughed young oaths if the wet winds
blew,
For the game was hot and scarlet then,
Fresh and wonderful, priceless, then —
But the years of a game are few.

We used to spatter through the ford
Where a gaunt, steel bridge now straddles the
creek,
And the dim hill trail we once explored
Is a motor highway, graded sleek;
Till the lure of just-around-the-turn,
The sharp, fresh hope of around-the-turn,
Is a poem the old men speak.

But the young men play their game with chance
In the age-long search for an unknown prize,
Where they find the trail of bright romance —
On the open range of the sun-swept skies;
While a cold, slow-hearted, gray old man,
A sun-tanned, wind-burned, dried old man,
Stands watching their game, and sighs.

In Protest

MY calico cayuse stamps the floor
An' whinnies, an' gets his grain;
The calves in the upper pasture lot
Are chasin' an' raisin' cain;
The pup gets his dinner set out on a plate;
The kittens hang round at the milk-house
gate;
The hens, for their three square meals a day,
Do nothin' but sit an' wait.
But I'm a man, an' — darn it all,
That jest means work — spring, summer, an'
fall.
Say, ain't life desolate!

Spring Fever

It's hard to tell jest what I want —

 An auto, maybe, or a yacht:

But, anyhow, I know it is

 Exactly what I have n't got.

I don't know where I want to go —

 Perhaps to India, or Tangier:

To tell the truth I'd like to live

 'Most any place except right here.

If I could be somebody else

 I sure don't know jest who I'd be.

There's one thing, though, I'm certain of —

 I'm good an' sick of bein' me.

Lodge-Stones .

ONCE a Blackfoot village lay along the sunny
coulee bottom
Where I built my homestead cabin near a living,
bubbling spring,
And everywhere I look, I find, half-hidden by the
grasses,
A score of rough stones marking out a ten-foot ring.

More than a hundred circles mark the spot where
once a people
Had their home, and starved or feasted on the
fortune of the chase.
But the gray stones, cradled in the tough sward of
the coulee,
Are the only indication of a vanished race.

Yet sometimes, when I'm loafing in my cabin door
at twilight,
Dreaming, lazy, while I wonder if the meadowlark
means rain,
Slowly, quietly, the coulee bottom fills with
painted lodges,
And the founders of the village come to claim their
own again.

LODGE-STONES

In a gay chiaroscuro rich with wild, barbaric color,
Gaudy blanket, tossing feather, flickering light on
 burnished skin,
Darting forms of dogs, and children, ponies stamp-
 ing in the shadow,
Every lodge a golden lantern from the cooking-fire
 within.

Now the purple wood smoke rises in a maze of
 twining columns
That gleam in red reflection of the council fire's
 glow;
Braves and wrinkled chiefs are gathering for the
 tribal talk of hunting,
And old legends of their fathers, mighty men of
 long ago.

Then I long to sit among them, there among those
 earlier masters
Of the hill and plain and river for a hundred miles
 around,
And I want to smoke the pipe of peace, and swear
 the oath of friendship,
With my ghostly Blackfoot brothers from the
 Happy Hunting Ground.

His Saddle

SHE's a tough ol' center-fire, an' she's black with
sweat an' dust,

Jest the leathers an' the latigoes are new.

Her skirts are curled, an' dry, an' cracked; her
horn is brown with rust,

Some calf has chewed the strings off, all but
two:

But she ain't fer sale at any price whatever,

'Cause she's been a friend to this ol' buckaroo.

She's kind o' narrow in the roll, an' flat across the
seat,

She's rounded like a bath-tub in the rear.

It's safer fer to use her sort o' easy and discreet

When ropin' of the festive yearlin' steer.

But the only thing that really counts, is *comfort*,

When a feller's in his fifty-seventh year.

I got her off a greaser, Jaun, down on the Chis-
holm trail,

When I rid for Sammy White in 'eighty-three;

An' the blazin' heat o' summer an' the blindin'
winter gale

Have shaped her till she's like a part o' me;

An' as long as I can fork a gentle cayuse

I'm a-stickin' to my ol' Visalia tree.

The Third Year

THEY say my land will bring eight thousand clear,
When I make proof, so I am well repaid
For three long, lonesome years. One month, and
then

Back to the busy, friendly world of men:
And yet — I wonder if I am afraid.

The man-talk, clean, fresh clothes, books, music,
plays,
Can all be mine again, if I should choose
To sell the claim and purchase old delights —
Things I have dreamed of through the weary
nights —
But — can they take the place of things I lose?

The city avenues are throbbing now,
An endless stream of rushing motor-cars;
Wet pavements glimmer in the warm spring dark.
Will street lamps, shining through the city park,
Replace the glory of the prairie stars?

Shall I be welcomed by the old-time friends,
Or must I learn new faces, other ways?

RHYMES OF A HOMESTEADER

Can office buildings, forty stories high,
Thrill like far mountains, white against the sky?
Can I forget the sun-drenched, careless days?

Three years ago the city held for me
All that I loved. I feared this empty view
Of sagebrush scrawled upon a baking plain.
These three long years, can they have forged a
chain
Too strong to break? Have old gods changed for
new?

The Critic

My notion of a holiday
It might seem queer to some;
It's crankin' up ol' Lizzie
Till her engine starts to hum,
Then crowdin' in behind the wheel
With Mother side o' me,
An' drivin' round the country
Criticisin' what I see.

First thing, we come to Wegner's place,
An' I drives kinder slow.
"Look there," says I to Mother,
"Where he's let the fan-weed grow!
An' that there tractor Herman bought,
It's gettin' red with rust!
I tell you, Ma, it's funny
Herman Wegner don't go bust."

At Henry Poleck's ranch, the barn
Is bad in need of paint.
Joe Brown ain't much ambitious,
An' his fences show he ain't.
Doc Howard's left his harrow in
A three-foot growth of weeds,

RHYMES OF A HOMESTEADER

An' there's Mis' Beasley's chickens
Scratchin' up her garden seeds!

Seems like the worse their places look
The cheerfuller I get,
Till Mother interrupts me,
Tellin' how she'd like to bet
That for every single, blessed thing
I found to criticise,
Our ranch could show one like it,
If I'd only use my eyes.

Ain't that jest like the women-folks?
They plain don't seem to know
Us fellers need refreshin'
After six days in a row.
An' when a man needs bracin' up
There's nothin' that begins
To help a feller, like the sight
Of other fellers' sins.

Overheard in the Smoking Compartment

“PRETTY slick, were n’t she! Sure — the little one
That jest went by the door — it’s her I mean.
I reckon you’ll be sorter driftin’ back
Onter the observation platform, won’t you?
I would.

What, not much interested! Say,
Young feller, don’t you go a-gettin’ mad
With me. Of course I know you’re married. Sure!
I seen your wife get on the train with you
At Harlowtown — a darn nice lady too.
That ain’t the point. Now, jest you listen here.

“I’m darn near old enough to be your dad:
I’ve got three kids: there’s Jim, my oldest boy,
He’s out in business now, an’ Tom an’ Rose,
They’re pretty near through college. So you see
Emma an’ me we’ve lived as man an’ wife
Close up to thirty years — thirty good years
Of clean, straight happiness we’ve had together.
There really ain’t no girl fer me but Em,
An’ Em, she thinks there ain’t no man but me.

“But twenty years ago there come a time
When happiness with me wus jest content.

RHYMES OF A HOMESTEADER

The harness wus a-rubbin' all the hair
From off my sides, an' right on top my neck
The collar galls wus showin' good an' plain,
An' I jest kept my eyes ahead, an' pulled
Without much hope or interest in life:
I wus a-growin' old — an' did n't care.

“Then come a girl. Vacationin' she wus,
At Archie Miller's place across the bench.
Little, an' crinkly-haired, an' smiley-mouthed,
An' darn good company fer any man.
An' somehow business seemed to take me round
To Archie's place quite frequent, an' of course
We got to joshin', she an' me, an' then
To takin' little hawseback rides together.
One day she come a-runnin' out, an' waved,
An' somethin' jest went *bump* inside my chest.

“Right then an' there I started fer the hills
An' hunted cattle pretty near a week,
Until I had the trouble sized up right.
Somethin' inside would say, ‘Bill, you old fool,
You're too darn old, an' too much settled-down
To be a-pitchin' round like this. You're *old*,
An' married. Orter be ashamed, you had!’
Then somethin' else would answer, ‘Hey, there,
Bill,

IN THE SMOKING COMPARTMENT

You ain't so old. Leastwise you ain't *too* old!
You keep right on a-playin' square with Em
Because she's Em. It ain't no cause fer shame
Fer to be good because you know it's right,
Instead of jest because you're too darn old
To ever feel the fun of bein' bad!'

"So when I had the whole thing straightened
out,

I went on home, an' in a day or two
Emma, she says, 'Say, Will, it looks to me
Like you'd grown ten years younger in a week.
You sing around the barn the way you did
The first year we wus married.' Then I went
An' kissed her on the nose, an' we both laughed.

"Why, say, I've got an old gray hawse at home
That could n't run a mile to save his hide,
But every time he sees an auto comin'
He scootches down, an' shies, an' gives a jump
Like he wus goin' to rip things into bits
An' never stop inside the county line.
But when I says, 'Whoa there, now, whoa,'
He quits right off, an' plods along contented.
It sorter helps him keep his self-respect
Fer me to holler 'Whoa,' like I wus scart.
I reckon it would darn near break his heart
To find his runnin' days wus clean gone by!

RHYMES OF A HOMESTEADER

“So now, young feller, when I sees a girl,
The little, smiley kind, with kidglove shoes,
An’ turned-up nose, an’ happy-lookin’ eyes,
An’ maybe jest a mite of powder where
It’s apt to smudge ag’in’ a feller’s coat,
I jest let things go bumpin’ round inside
Fer quite a while; an’ then I says to me,
‘Whoa, Bill, now, who-o-a!’
It kinder keeps me young.”

The Game of Games

SOME fellers git their Sunday fun tryin' to make an
auto run,

There's others like to hang around ol' Henry
Smith's saloon.

Each feller to his taste, says I, but jest the same,
they orter try

That game called *pitchin' hawseshoes*, on a Sunday
afternoon.

The time is half-pas' two o'clock; the place, behind
Len's blacksmith shop.

Up at the house our women-folk is swappin' of the
news.

There's Len, an' Jake, an' Steve McGee, that kid
o' Len's, the pup, an' me;

We has our coats an' collars off, an', more than
like, our shoes.

To tell the truth, though, we don't aim to over-
work at this here game,

I ain't prepared to say we even takes it serious.

We mostly likes to lie around flat on our bellies on
the ground,

An' smoke, an' watch the other feller doin' worse
than us.

RHYMES OF A HOMESTEADER

O' course, there's times our fightin' blood gets up,
an' starts to runnin' good,
When Jake'll maybe bet as much as four-bits on
a throw.
An' then if one of them fat plums, a ringer or a
leaner, comes,
You orter hear us holler, an' you orter hear Jake
blow!

An' when the shade has moved away from there,
you'll hear some feller say,
"That kid o' Len's, he's lookin' sorter hungry,
don't yer think?"
So Len he says, "Come on now, son, yo' mother
wants you; better run!"
He seems to know instinctive that we're hopin' fer
a drink.

It's generally in a jug that's stoppered with a
wooden plug
An' kinder cool an' muddy, "some o' Minnie's
rhubub wine."
Well, now, o' course that might be so — I ain't
a-tellin' all I know —
But jest about three swallers sends us home a-feel-
in' fine.

THE GAME OF GAMES

It ain't a complicated game a-tall; it might seem
 kinder tame
Fer them as likes to sweat an' fuss, an' them as
 likes a spree,
But personal I sure despise unnecessary exercise:
That game of pitchin' hawseshoes is the one wus
 made fer me.

Hope

THE boss's daughter is home from school,
An', say! I'm growin' downright mad,
Jest from watchin' her cuddle up
To that tough ol' guy, her dad.

Eyes that sparkle, an' lips that smile,
Laugh like a clean spring bubblin' over —
Slick an' neat from top to toe,
Makes me think of June, an' clover.

Back as straight as a willow shoot,
Sittin' up there on her ol' white pony.
Don't look like she ever could
Settle down to matrimony.

The boss, he's rated a millionaire:
All I'm gettin' is board an' fifty.
That ain't much for two to live on,
Even if we both was thrifty.

Still, you can't never always tell,
Things *do* sometimes happen funny,
An' the story papers say
Rich folks hate to think of money.

HOPE

Gee, I'm goin' to slick my hair,
Put on a shirt, an' a stand-up collar;
Heard the boss tell, jest last night,
Once he did n't have a dollar.

The Morning Ride

THE foothills flood with scarlet and gold,
And chilly dawn winds blow;
There's a keen, fresh odor of passing night,
There's a meadowlark singing with all his might
In the gray-green valley below.
And I keep time with a song of my own
To a measure beaten out
By the hoofs of a horse on crumbling shale,
As he follows a faint old cattle trail
That shuttles and winds about
Down to the sage-grown valley floor:
With a careless rein I ride,
Enthralled by the coppery lights that fleck
The burnished curve of his mighty neck,
And the long, free swing of his stride.

Boundless the currents of life that flow
From his strong, hot body. I feel them flood
Through my own life channels; the tingling blood
Leaps with an answering glow.
And we smash through the pungent sagebrush
In a spendthrift burst of speed,
Drunken with youth and the wind's rush,
Two of the gods' own breed.

THE MORNING RIDE

And the straight miles fly behind us
Like the passing of crowded years,
But we are kin to the whistling wind
That shouts in our ringing ears!

Oh, it's good to be out in the morning
On the back of a four-year-old,
In the first cool flush of the dawning,
When the foothills flood with gold!

Day Dreams

'LONG about this time of year, when the city's hot,
Feller seems to lose his head — cusses quite a lot.

'T ain't as if he'd never lived out where things are
big;
Seven years at ridin' range sometimes gives a dig!

Down the coulee, leathers squeakin',
N-Bar's ridin', work all through.
All of God's free air above 'em,
Sunset crimsonin' before 'em,
Purple sagebrush hills about 'em —
Gosh! I'd like to be there, too!

Cook, he yells, "Come on 'n' git it!"
Sees 'em comin' up the crick.
Twistin' dust-cloud rollin' homeward,
Twenty ponies tearin' homeward,
All the old gang racin' homeward —
Gee, but clerkin' makes me sick!

Huh? What's that about a shipment? Fourteen
stoves to J. McKirk?
Well, s' long, you N-Bar fellers; me, I've got to go
to work.

The Meadowlark

MEN say that an old god, Pan, is dead.
Do you believe what men say? Hark
To Pan's own music ringing out
From the yellow throat of the meadowlark.

The old god Pan has changed his form,
For his shaggy hide was too well known,
But still he reigns, and still he pipes
From a hummock of earth, or a fence-post throne.

The little brown god throws back his head
While up and up the sweet notes fling,
And the hearts of men are tuned again
To his rollicking, maddening song of spring.

A Song of the Trail

RIDIN', an' ridin' —

What's the use decidin'

Where you're goin', when you're on the trail, like
me?

Salt Lake or ol' Montan',

Don't seem to give a damn,

Been a-workin' seven months

An' now I'm free!

A-goin', an' goin' —

Sun jest barely showin':

Hear the curlew whistle from the standin' wheat!

Air starts a-gettin' chill,

Coyote hollers on the hill;

Poke along, you Billy-hawse,

It's time to eat.

A-ridin', an' ridin' —

There's a ranch a-hidin'

In the coulee yonder, where the lamplight shows.

Guess I'd better take a look,

Mebby I kin work the cook

Fer a bite of supper

An' a bed. Who knows!

Temptation

CHET SIMMS rode over lately fer to say
That he an' Bess, they wanted I should come
Fer supper at their place, next Saturday,
An' meet a friend, a little girl from home.
"She's rich, an' single, an' a blonde," says Chet,
"The nicest little kid you ever met."

Why — gosh, I got so mad I had to cuss!
"See here," says I, "I've heard them words
before,
It gets me feelin' right cantankerous
To listen to 'em now; an', furthermore,
Tell Bess I ain't a-comin'; friends of hers
Ain't the society that I prefers.

"They're good an' glad to ride my pinto mare
Because she's lady-broke, an' full of go.
They work me every minute I kin spare —
I've been a sort of private Wild West show —
But as a team mate in the marriage yoke
I'm jest a bowlegged, leather-colored joke!"

Says I, "I've had enough of pretty girls —
The kind that comes from home: blonde or
brunette.

RHYMES OF A HOMESTEADER

The hours I've wasted with 'em ain't no pearls
Upon *my* rosary," says I to Chet.
"I want a girl round forty, that'll dress
Close to one-hundred-sixty, more or less."

But Chet jest grins, an' says there were n't but
three
Previous to this, an' not a single one
Of them had yeller hair, like Marjorie —
I'd ought to see it shinin' in the sun.
An' when he rides away he hollers back,
"Them blondes is different! Six o'clock now,
Mac!"

The married folks, they bother me a lot,
A-settin' of their matrimonial traps
Right in plain sight. They sure do like to plot
Ag'in' us bachelors. But — now perhaps
A blonde *is* different. Guess there would n't be
One mite of harm in droppin' in to see!

A Song of the Wire Fence

MILLIONS of miles of shining metal threads
Cutting the plain in geometric lines,
Climbing aloft among the mountain pines,
I show the way wherever Progress treads.

I bound the cultivated fields of man,
Divide his cattle from the masterless,
I form a barrier to the wilderness;
I end that which has been since time began.

My barbed and twisted strands have marked the
change
That comes when Nature pays the debt she
owes.
I whisper to each heedless wind that blows
The last low dirges of the open range.

Spirits of the Benchland

ON the green, soft fields of England the fairies
dance at night,

Wheel in glinting gossamer rings
Round pretty queens and merry kings,
With songs that are silver light.

But the benchland plains are barren and gray, for
the winds of the bench are cold,
And the spirit folk of the benchland are withered,
and gray, and old —
Gaunt, and wrinkled, and old.

The weary rider meets them in dark, and wind,
and rain,

Nights when the trail is blotted out,
When south and north are turned about
By the autumn hurricane.

And they ride beside him naked and grim, as they
guide his pony true,
Till he sees, ahead in the blackness, the lights of a
ranch prick through —
Home-lights glimmering through.

The lone sheep-herder knows them. Each empty,
empty day,

Gliding from out the sage they come
And squat around him, withered, dumb,
Till his vacant mind gives way;

SPIRITS OF THE BENCHLAND

Till he curses them in jabbered words for chimeras
born of gin,
When they fly away to the rimrock, to signal at
him, and grin —
Beckon, and beckon, and grin.

Their haunts are the lonely places; the sage plain's
olive gloom,
Ridges of wind-racked lodgepole pine,
Where snow packs deep, and storm winds whine,
Or the cutbank coulee's womb.
Through eternity they are keeping watch, in a
land they have patrolled
Since the dawn of things, and the bench folk are
gray, and shrunk, and old —
Old as their land is old.

The Old-Timer Remarks —

THERE's fellers that take to this "uplift" stuff

Like kids to a bran-new game,

But I never wus raised on no blame pink teas,

I never wus curried below the knees,

'N' I'm proud fer to state the same.

This little ol' town — I wus mayor of her once,

In the days of 'eighty-one —

She's a-passin' so darn many "anti" laws

That she's only a comf'tible place fer squaws;

I don't enjoy her none.

At the south end of Main, where the Gold Bar
stood,

There's a shop fer female lids,

'N' the ol' Last Chance, with its sawdust floor —

Where it paid yer to sit so yer faced the door —

It's a school fer backward kids!

Ain't there a place in the universe

Fer a set ol' cuss, like me?

Sixty-five is late fer a feller to change,

Too late fer a critter to shift his range

'N' herd with new company.

THE OLD-TIMER REMARKS —

It ain't in nothin' the parson says,
But I'm bettin' jest the same,
That the other side of the Great Divide
There's a place where fellers like me kin hide,
Who wus caught too late to tame.

I'll bet there's a corner all set apart
Where there's sage, 'n' alkali,
'N' a few board shacks, 'n' a gen'ral store,
'N' a livery barn or two — nothin' more
But a bar, fer when yer dry.

It's a corner fer fellers that could n't quite
Make their ways 'n' the law agree.
There'd be lots of friends as would stand a treat
In the crowd that started with ol' Saint Pete
'N' includes right down to me.

'N' if God would look in on us once a day,
Sorter smile, 'n' nod His head,
'N' order the angels to let us alone —
Then I could n't ask more fer my permanent
home;
I'll be mighty glad I'm dead.

The Riverside Press
CAMBRIDGE . MASSACHUSETTS
U . S . A

